

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE HOUSING & REGENERATION SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

HELD AT 6.32 P.M. ON MONDAY, 24 JUNE 2024

COUNCIL CHAMBER - TOWN HALL, WHITECHAPEL

Members Present:

Councillor Bodrul Choudhury (Chair)

Councillor Ana Miah

Councillor Ahmodul Kabir

Councillor Amin Rahman

Councillor Mohammad Chowdhury

Councillor Asma Islam

Councillor Kabir Ahmed

Councillor Marc Francis

Co-opted Members Present:

Mahbub Anam (Tenant representative)

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Kabir Ahmed - (Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding)

Officers Present:

Michael Killeen – (Director - Housing Asset Management)

Sripriya Sudhakar – Director of Planning and Building Control

Rupert Brandon – Interim Head of Housing Supply

Justina Bridgeman – Democratic Services Officer (Committee)

Officers Present Remotely:

Karen Swift – (Director - Housing & Regeneration)
Tracey Gray - (Interim Director, Housing Integration)

Invited Guests:

Andrea Baker -(Chair of Tower Hamlets Housing Forum (THHF))

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests, however, Councillor Amin Rahman declared he sits on the Tower Hamlets Community Housing Board.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR

The Chair requested nominations for the position of Vice-Chair of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee for the municipal year 2024/25. Councillor Ahmodul Kabir proposed Councillor Amin Rahman for the position. This was seconded by Councillor Ana Miah.

There were no further nominations received.

The Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** to:

1. Elect Councillor Amin Rahman the Vice-Chair of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee for the municipal year 2024/25.

3. HOUSING AND REGENERATION TERMS OF REFERENCE, MEMBERSHIP, QUORUM & DATES OF MEETING FOR 2024/25

Justina Bridgeman, Democratic Services Officer requested members to note the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee's terms of reference, membership, quorum and meeting dates for the municipal year 2023/25. The terms of reference were agreed at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 21 May 2024.

The Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee **RESOLVED** to:

1. Note it's terms of reference, quorum, membership and meeting dates as set out in appendices 1,2 and 3 of the report pending minor amendments for appendix 3.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING(S)

The minutes of the Sub Committee meeting held on 13 May 2024 were signed and approved as a correct record of proceedings.

5. OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

Paul Burgess, Strategy and Policy Officer, circulated the actions which had no updates on overdue items. Work is ongoing with the Director of Housing and Regeneration to close these down by the next sub-committee meeting in September.

Members were also informed that following the last meeting of the previous municipal year; where residents of Tower Hamlets Community Housing (THCH) gave feedback, Anita Khan, CEO refuted residents claims. The housing provider will be invited to the sub-committee to discuss data and performance concerns once the work programme is finalised.

A request has been made to Mayor Lutfur Rahman to initiate a formal request to meet with the Minister for Housing, the Regulator for Social Housing, and MPs to investigate THCH performance concerns on behalf of residents. The sub-committee will be updated once further details have been received.

Paul also noted that at a scrutiny work program held on 13 June, Steve Halsey, Chief Executive Officer, proposed to increase the frequency of Overview and Scrutiny Committees, and Sub-committees. Once the final outcome is determined, amendments can be implemented in the terms and conditions.

6. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

6.1 Review the Progress Against the Ambition to Build 1000 New Homes a Year

Councillor Kabir Ahmed, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Inclusive Development and Housebuilding, introduced the first item, and presented an update on the target for delivering 4000 new affordable homes between 2022 and 2026.

Members were informed of the economic challenges, the private sector delivery and Council led housebuilding, with the latter requiring significant resources to deliver and expand the programme.

Councillor Kabir Ahmed noted that housing build starts across all tenures decreased by 24%, and new building regulations for new buildings over 18 metres are now required to install secondary staircases. This has meant that certain programmes were required to return to the planning stage to accommodate this.

The 40% inflation rise has also affected developers. Both the Council's Planning and Housing Delivery teams are currently working with developers to assist in the completion of programmes. Housing providers are also reluctant to start new programs, due to the cost of extensive repairs for existing properties.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, Councillor Kabir Ahmed and Officers;

- Confirmed that a written brief detailing the breakdown of the 459 affordable units completed in 2023-24 will be presented to the sub-committee for review.
- Clarified that development completion is dependent on the size of the site. As an example, the initial planning application for the former News International site in Wapping took place in 2012. The completion of the project is still ongoing.
- Clarified the four sites as; The Great Eastern Enterprise Centre, South Bay Plaza, Poplar Transformation Centre, Union Bridge TSC building and Spire London, Hertsmere House. Members were informed that these sites contain all tenured units.
- The GLA definition of affordable housing is any social rented, affordable rented and intermediate housing provided to eligible households, whose needs are not met by the market.
- Clarified that tenders went out in April and the selection questionnaire process will then determine who is selected for detailed evaluation. A report will be submitted to Cabinet by the end of the year and details of preferred contract holders will be confirmed by February 2025.
- Explained that there are approximately 10,000 homes that could receive planning permission and are at various stages of development. Some are awaiting the completion of section 106 agreements; some have gone through Committee stage and some awaiting approval at Committee. Among these homes, approximately a quarter of them are classified as affordable across all tenures, as per the GLA definition.
- Confirmed that the Planning, Capital delivery and Housing Delivery teams are working with housing providers on joint ventures to reduce issues that could delay progress, such as assistance with registered providers (PR) or receiving a PR. Work is also ongoing to mediate in these instances. Consideration is also being given to invest with housing providers through buyback schemes as well as GLA match funding.
- Clarified that the term delivery means when properties are officially signed off by the Building Control team as completed. At present there

are 30 sites currently undergoing construction which will deliver 2,519 affordable homes in the borough once completed.

- Explained that there are two types of programs available for Council owned property delivery, funded and unfunded. The unfunded list of schemes can commence once government opportunities, Section 106's instalments, buybacks and grants are available.
- Confirmed that the former London Chest Hospital site is a live planning application, which will be heard at the Strategic Development Committee on 16 July meeting. The application proposes 276 homes with 121 of those a variety of affordable rented and intermediate units.
- Clarified that the Council is committed through the Mid Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), to purchase up to 600 new homes with assistance from the GLA's match financing scheme.
- Acknowledged that there are challenges with direct delivery funding, as it can slow down the process, due to the section 106 contracts between planners and developers. Once funding is released, unfunded programs can then receive funds.
- Acknowledged that there are other challenges in terms of legislation changes that have pushed back the delivery for social housing providers and joint ventures with private developers. There have been financial issues with PR's, as previously stated. However, the Council is committed to reaching the target to provide affordable homes.

The Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee **RESOLVED**:

1. That a written brief detailing the breakdown of the 459 Affordable units completed in 2023-24 be presented to the sub-committee for review.
2. That a written brief outlining the breakdown of Council housing schemes in development from 2021 to early 2022, a progress report on those schemes and updates on new Council schemes or buybacks thereafter.
3. That the presentation be noted.

6.2 Review the Progress of THH Major Works Programme

Councillor Kabir Ahmed introduced update which included the Capital Programme Expenditure for 2023-24. Members were informed that the original Budget £26.368m was revised mid-year to £20 million, due to a drop in the volume of work initially forecast. Details of completed works were noted, including electrical testing for 5,042 households, 355 domestic boiler replacements, 380 fire safe replacement doors and 53 replacement kitchens.

Details of the tenant satisfaction surveys were also noted as were challenges with contractors and increases to materials, labour costs and building regulation changes. Michael Kileen, the Director of Asset Management, further explained the challenges within the last two years, particularly a lack of interest with contractors on delivering kitchen and bathroom upgrades, which hindered the programme. There have also been delays due to the increased value of complex works and fire safety concerns. This resulted in some projects being deferred.

Further to questions from the sub-committee, Councillor Kabir Ahmed and Officers;

- Confirmed that the 'Fabric First' approach will be utilised to identify historical repairs, buildings with high levels of damp and mould or similar issues within older blocks, which will be implemented into the programme of repairs. Preventive measures will also be undertaken.
- Requested that any issues with damp and mould in specific wards be forwarded to Councillor Kabir Ahmed and Officers for further investigation. A breakdown of repairs undertaken to resolve issues of damp and mould will be brought back to the sub-committee for review.
- Explained that THH have 928 blocks will 77 subjected to the new Gateway assessments, as they are over 18 metres high. Future planning is currently underway to establish fire safety operations, in anticipation of new building regulations that may further affect works. Upgrades on insulating windows and roofs are still being implemented.
- Confirmed that some of the 4,158 street properties are planned for improvements although there have been delays in works. An update on the programme will be forwarded to the sub-committee for review.
- Noted that the revised 2 year programme will commence on 31 July 2024 and details of the Capital programme will be available on the Council website for review.
- Clarified that structural steel works commenced in early January 2023 and residents from Angela House were decanted. The delays occurred due to material supply and contract issues; however, works are progressing.
- Confirmed that Brewster and Maltings House works are now completed and scaffolding has been removed.

The Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee **RESOLVED**:

1. That a breakdown of repairs undertaken to resolve issues of damp and mould be brought back to the sub-committee for review.

2. That an update on the street properties programme be brought back to the sub-committee for review.
3. That the presentation be noted.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Paul Burgess informed Members that a scrutiny work program is currently being developed and any items they wish to be added should be forwarded to him.

The meeting ended at 8.06 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Bodrul Choudhury

Housing & Regeneration Scrutiny Sub Committee